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## CONTINUING EDUCATION

Olga Lendvay

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### INTRODUCTION

Due to accelerated growth and expansion of knowledge and technology, obsolescence is the central concept and concern in discussing Continuing Education. In order to maintain their job effectiveness, all professionals need to acquire new knowledge after receiving their last degree.

During the sixties, many library/information science professionals were involved in independent studies on Continuing Education. However, the subject only started to be treated in depth in professional literature at the beginning of the seventies. Since that time a remarkable increase in all aspects of involvement in Continuing Education has taken place at universities, by professionals, associations and employers, and Continuing Education has become universally considered a necessity for preventing extensive obsolescence during the career of any professional.

Educators tend to look on Continuing Education in a broader sense and see it as a life-long activity and learning as an active inquiry into different subjects of knowledge not necessarily connected with individuals' former formal education. Based on the general assumption that university curricula inadequately reflect the needs of rapidly-changing societies, they feel that education will be moving out of university classrooms and will take place at home, at work, etc. This process, they predict, will be accelerated by the increasing availability of multi-media technology and the combination of existing practices with new technologies.

### DEFINITION AND SCOPE

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The term "Continuing Education" has many meanings and a universally accepted definition is still to be found. According

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to some groups, the term excludes formal education for a degree or specialty training leading to certification.

The American Library Association (ALA)<sup>(1)</sup> defines it as "referring to all activities and efforts by the individual to upgrade his knowledge, abilities, competencies or understanding in his field of specialization".

Houle<sup>(3)</sup> states that: "Continuing Education might be defined as any type of learning or teaching which extends or builds upon previous experience in the same general realm of knowledge and whose specific goals are not intended to terminate all study in that realm. It implies that the learner has studied some related body of content previously and is carrying on the process further; it implies that the programs depend upon his having done so; and it implies that he proposes to continue such learning in the future".

For Nattress<sup>(4)</sup> "Continuing Education should be goal-oriented rather than activity-oriented, that is, the objective should be clearly stated in behavioral terms before any activity is planned. The activity should be appropriate to the objectives. Therefore, Continuing Education is a process whereby a person who has completed his formal education is provided with a means for meeting his needs for further personal development."

However, in contrast to the concept limiting Continuing Education to non-degree studies, opportunities of formal education for a degree or special training leading to certification were discussed within the framework of Continuing Education at the recent World Conference on Continuing Education (Palos Hill, Illinois, 13 - 16 August). The Open University system (UK) is one example of institutions offering multi-media distance courses at degree level.

The scope of Continuing Education can be divided into formal study and informal learning such as conferences, workshops, professional meetings, reading, etc. According to ALA<sup>(2)</sup>, both formal and informal learning situations "need not be limited to library subjects or the offerings of library schools" but should be

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limited to education or training which better equip a person for his/her contemporary work, for the job he/she has now, or aspires to in the near future.

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

The individual carries the basic responsibility for his own development and for keeping up-to-date, but others share in this responsibility. The employing institution is responsible for encouraging the individual to keep up-to-date. The professional societies and universities are expected to help by providing the opportunities from which the individual can select those related to his/her needs.

Practising librarians would like to see library/information science schools be more effective in their role of Continuing Education. An improvement would imply continuous adaptation of the curriculum to behavioral, societal and technological advances and to the provision of courses needed by the participants in their present jobs. Such courses should be interdisciplinary in scope, flexible and not bound by insistence upon credits and advanced degrees, and should be accessible to all regardless of geographical location.

While some library/information science schools have been providing good programs in Continuing Education (short courses, in-lab courses, seminars, symposia and non-credit courses especially designed for practitioners), others have been offering only a minimal level of activity by admitting non-degree students to regular university credit courses but no modification has been made to the courses to meet the needs and objectives of Continuing Education as the schools feel that any modification would weaken the standards of the degree-seeking programs. And there are still some schools which do not offer any means of Continuing Education. In general, academic institutions consider their primary function to be training students for degrees and to generate new knowledge through research.

Some universities feel that they cannot be expected to supply all the effort in continuing education. Rather, it should be a

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collaborative effort between universities, training professionals, associations, employers and the professional person him/herself. What the university faculty can contribute to this collaborative effort is not only their knowledge and experience with teaching but also their knowledge and experience with studying and evaluating the needs and methods of learning.

Practising librarians/information professionals feel that education should be one of the most vital functions of professional associations if they hope to fulfill their obligations to members and would like to see them assume a more important role in providing opportunities for Continuing Education.

Actually, there is much concern and considerable activity on the part of professional associations (e.g. ALA, LA, SLA, MLA, LAA, etc.) in providing opportunities for Continuing Education. There are many conferences, workshops, and short courses offered by associations and also by library schools and other agencies, but all these activities seem to lack a pattern of progression and coordination between the informal learning experience and formal education.

Distance learning was emphasized at the recent Conference on Continuing Education; television, teleconferencing, computer conferencing, etc., which is actually being used in several US States and in the UK, were discussed as effective media for reaching a multitude of students who might otherwise be unable to gain access to Continuing Education.

Formal correspondence courses have been available for a long time and by the use of new technologies are being converted into multi-media teaching packages available for distance education. The Open University in the UK is one of the multi-media distance teaching institutions offering such courses. Students receive their course component by mail from the University and via radio and television.

Distance education can free people from constraints of time and place and learning can be pursued in addition to normal employment.

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Recognition for Continuing Education seems to be a problem. With the exception of a few established programs, in general participants in Continuing Education activities have received little or no recognition for taking part in this educational process. Usually only certificates for participating in a program or certificates of attendance are given. As there is no universally accepted means for measuring non-credit activity, some students feel that the absence of a system to give recognition has tended to weaken the concept of education as a life-long process.

Because of lack of standards, evaluation of Continuing Education is difficult and is rarely done. However, those who have done it are recommending to future evaluators that they be aware of what the ideal is and to evaluate reaction, learning, behavior of students and their results.

The need for a clearinghouse on Continuing Education was brought up at the recent Conference on Continuing Education. While a data base on Continuing Education is in operation in the State of Illinois, which can be accessed through a toll-free line, the nationwide (US) network has been discontinued and an international information system does not exist.

The participants of the Conference recommended that the possibility be explored with IFLA of creating a Committee within the Association which would take care of matters related to Continuing Education, and especially with regard to the establishment of a worldwide clearinghouse on information for Continuing Education, in cooperation with FID and, if possible, with other international agencies.

#### CONTINUING EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

As in industrialized countries, Continuing Education is also a necessity - and may be more so - in developing countries. It is needed in the more traditional areas of librarianship/information science as well as in the areas of information processing and dissemination by the use of modern technologies.

University library/information science schools are well aware of

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the urgency of providing Continuing Education opportunities for practising professionals but there are very few which have actually been offering some kind of training. Most of the schools experience difficulties (financial, lack of teaching staff, etc.) in coping with their present programs and the assurance of their continuity either at degree or certificate level.

Some Continuing Education related to information treatment for international information systems (e.g. AGRIS, CARIS, DEVSIS, etc.) has been available to practising librarians from institutions which cooperate with those systems, and training has also been provided to those responsible for operation of hardware and software. Training courses, seminars and workshops have been organized for them by international organizations coordinating these systems, by some national institutions cooperating with the systems, or by cooperation between the two.

Furthermore, organizations like UNESCO, DSE, etc. have been sponsoring short courses in different subject specialties designed to improve the knowledge of practising information staff at institutions in developing countries. In spite of the fact that admission requires previous formal (degree) training in library/information science schools, these courses have been attended by many participants who were exposed to a formal training in the field for the first time.

In comparison to the needs, training through such courses has been available to only a few, and, in many instances - because of the wrong choice of candidates - not to the people who actually needed it to improve their work.

The present picture of Continuing Education in developing countries is very sad, and dramatic improvements can hardly be expected. However, there is a hope in regard to the use of communication media such as TV, which, some educators predict, will become very cheap in the not-too-distant future and will be affordable even by the most economically disadvantaged people in developing countries.

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### CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR STAFF OF IDRC/IS PROJECTS

Opportunities for Continuing Education have been available to staff of IS projects through short courses, seminars, workshops, conferences, meetings, etc., offered by universities, associations, international organizations and specialized institutions.

Furthermore, IS projects themselves have run workshops on methodologies related to specific information systems, e.g. DEVSIS, AGRIS, to train groups of staff from institutions cooperating in the systems and the MINISIS Group has been providing training to staff of institutions which acquired the software, and to others.

One of the most obvious and important modes of Continuing Education is the reading of professional literature. This mode has been used by IS in order to provide staff in its projects with an opportunity to improve their knowledge and to keep them up-to-date with developments in specific areas of information sciences.

The instruction has been available since May 1983 through carefully selected, mainly periodical, literature on the topics of indexing and abstracting, management of information centres, dissemination of information, reprography, basics in computerization, information marketing and telecommunications, and sent to projects in the form of packages. Responses from projects indicate that the literature service is fulfilling its role as an informal Continuing Education means and is greatly appreciated by projects' staff.

Continuing Education offered by industrialized countries' professional associations has not been used by IS for training projects' staff mainly because these opportunities are of very short duration (one, two or three days) and are on very specific subject matter needed for up-grading the knowledge of practising professionals in those countries. We could hardly justify the financial expense involved in bringing a person from a long distance for such short training.

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Not long ago we tried to register candidates (from China) in Canadian university library/information science schools as special students (not interested in a degree) to attend one semester which included courses relevant to them. We have not been successful as the universities insisted that the candidates fulfill the same admission requirements as the degree-seeking students.

Professional associations, academic institutions and specialized institutes in developing countries are trying to create opportunities for improvement of their library/information-handling practitioners. However, in order to succeed, most of them require some financial and technical support from institutions in industrialized countries and from international organizations engaged in support of development of Third World countries. In the future, as in the past, our practice in placing staff from projects in a Continuing Education type of training will require a continuous awareness of the opportunities available and the use of those which are most appropriate for the particular needs of projects.



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